

Ambassador's Remarks for Panel Discussion
Innovation and International Industrial Cooperation:
Nuclear Power as a Response to Carbon Emission Challenge
09:00 on Tuesday April 12, 2011
Hilton Hotel

International Cooperation to Support Poland's
Nuclear Program to Reduce Carbon Emissions

(As prepared for delivery).

Pani Minister, szanowni państwo, drodzy goście.

I am delighted to be here with you today to talk about how our countries can respond to the challenge of reducing carbon emissions, and what role nuclear power can play in our countries' efforts to meet our energy needs.

Before I do, let me welcome my good friend, Pani Minister, who will be addressing this issue later in Parliament. Minister Trojanowska is one of the people spearheading Poland's nuclear power strategy, and I am pleased and honored, as always, to be sharing the dais with her.

Let me also thank my good friends at Westinghouse for organizing this event. Every American school child knows Westinghouse, which has a great tradition of innovation and support for science education. I am very pleased that Westinghouse has brought that tradition to Poland. I will say more about that in a moment.

We meet here at a tumultuous time. In the past few months, we've seen regimes toppled. We've seen democracy activists take to the streets in North Africa and in the Middle East. We've witnessed a terrible earthquake, a catastrophic tsunami, a nuclear emergency that has battered one of America's strongest allies and closest friends in the world's third largest economy. The United States has led an international effort in Libya to prevent a massacre and maintain stability throughout the broader region.

We're all heartbroken by the lives that have been lost as a result of these events. We're deeply moved by the thirst for freedom in so many nations, and we're moved by the strength and perseverance of the Japanese people.

These events underscore the importance of today's session. Because fundamentally diversifying our sources of energy and developing new sources that

do not contribute to carbon emissions is a matter of security for Poland, for Europe, and for the United States.

With this in mind, President Obama outlined a blueprint for America's energy security in his speech at Georgetown University on March 30. His formula calls for increasing domestic sources of energy, increasing energy efficiency, and developing new and better clean energy technologies. It includes careful consideration of nuclear power, an option President Obama has said, we can't take off the table.

Energy security is a focus of the U.S.-Polish alliance; it is one of the pillars of our relationship. I have witnessed firsthand the importance of this issue. Presidents Obama and Komorowski discussed prospects for nuclear energy cooperation together in the Oval Office last December. Foreign Minister Sikorski and Secretary Clinton regularly discuss energy security. In the past year or so, our governments have signed three agreements on energy cooperation, including nuclear energy cooperation.

Shale gas has garnered the greatest amount of attention thus far. U.S. companies pioneered the technology and methods of producing gas from shale

rock. This has made us nearly self sufficient in gas and driven down prices on the world market. Poland has some of the most promising untapped shale resources. Several major U.S. oil and gas companies are now actively exploring and drilling test wells alongside companies from Poland and elsewhere. Only time and their hard work can tell us whether shale gas production in Poland will be commercially viable. We will be discussing the prospects for shale gas together at a conference jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Embassy on May 18 at the Copernicus Science Center.

Wind energy is another area where the United States is a world leader and an active supporter of other countries' moves toward renewable energy production. In Poland, U.S. companies like AES and Invenenergy are developing wind farms and helping to fuel the remarkable growth in Poland's wind energy production. Poland is starting from a very low base and is only half way to its target of producing 15% of its energy from renewables by 2020. Thus, there is still ample opportunity to grow the business and advance cooperation between our governments and research institutions.

The same goes for biomass, where U.S. companies are providing top-notch technology. Under the Global Methane Initiative, the U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency is working with the Polish Ministry of Environment to promote the recovery of methane from landfills. By capturing and burning the methane, we can generate heat and power and address climate change. That's because, the global warming impact of methane is 20 times more powerful than that of CO₂.

Given our significant coal resources, the United States and Poland share an interest in developing and deploying new technologies that would allow us to burn coal cleanly and without contributing to global warming. Our countries' scientists are working on ways to increase the efficiency of coal-fired power plants and on carbon capture and storage. We also work together with a variety of other countries in the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum.

Finally, let's take a look at nuclear energy, which is the issue that brings us all here together today. As I said earlier, I would like to express on behalf of my government and my country our deepest sympathy for and solidarity with the people of Japan. The massive earthquake, the tsunami it generated, and the resulting nuclear crisis that hit Japan ranks among the worst natural disasters in human memory. As a staunch ally, the United States has assisted Japan in a variety of ways as it copes with this staggering series of events.

When the crisis at Fukushima occurred, public concerns about nuclear power increased around the world. This is understandable, and we should increase our focus on safety. President Obama and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission are doing just that. But, as President Obama has said, nuclear energy does not contribute to carbon emissions, and is an option we should not take off the table.

For decades, nuclear power has provided been a safe, domestic source of energy that does not pollute the air or cause global warming. And given the world's growing demand for energy, it is hard to imagine how we could get by without nuclear power. It would be nice if renewables could meet all our energy needs – hopefully one day they will – but there are still important technological and cost hurdles that we must overcome before that dream can become reality. In the meantime, we will need nuclear power as a component of our energy mix.

The United States is the world's leading producer of nuclear energy, producing nearly twice as much as its nearest competitor. We have 104 nuclear power plants that produce 20% of our electricity. American companies, such as Westinghouse, developed nuclear power plant technology that is now in use around the world. A number of other countries have based their own nuclear power plant designs on American technology.

Poland's government has recognized the need to diversify its energy mix. As you probably know, over 90% of Poland's electricity is generated from coal, which is very carbon intensive. Thus, nuclear power will allow Poland to achieve greater energy security and move concretely toward a lower carbon economy.

The United States and Poland are committed to industrial and commercial cooperation on nuclear power. Minister Trojanowska and senior officials from the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Energy issued a joint declaration to this effect last July. Nuclear power was also an element of the memorandum of understanding on clean and efficient energy cooperation that our two governments signed in early March during Minister Sikorski's visit to Washington. Looking ahead, nuclear power will be one of the major items on the agenda for the U.S.-Poland Energy roundtable in Warsaw on May 11-12. This event will provide a platform for discussions among senior government officials and representatives of leading U.S. and Polish energy companies.

The United States and Poland share a commitment to the safe operation of our nuclear power plants. In fact, the heads of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Polish Atomic Energy Agency (PAA) signed an

agreement on nuclear safety cooperation last September. Shortly afterwards, NRC began a joint training program in Poland. But this is only the beginning.

Nuclear safety requires strong legal frameworks and robust regulators. Because of our long history of civil nuclear power, NRC has become a model regulator, whose standards have been adopted across the globe. As Poland begins to develop civil the option of developing its own nuclear power, the NRC is ready to help PAA meet that challenge. NRC offers a wide variety of training courses at no charge and would welcome the participation of Polish regulators.

We are working to support the development of the human capital Poland will need to build, operate, and regulate its nuclear power sector. The government and the private sector will need a cadre of qualified professionals and the current supply is insufficient. Polish universities have a major task before them. They must rebuild, upgrade, and expand their programs. The United States is home to many of the best nuclear engineering programs in the world and they can help Poland meet its goals. For this reason, the U.S. government is supporting Polish universities, such as the Warsaw University of Technology, as they establish formal training and joint research programs with American counterparts like Oregon State University and North Carolina State University.

In addition, I have worked closely with the Polish-American Freedom Foundation to offer Polish science and engineering students the chance to do an internship with American high-tech companies. I am pleased to say that Westinghouse is one of the main contributors to this program. I am certain that this will be of great benefit to the Polish students, the U.S. companies, and – most of all – the future success of Poland's nuclear power program.

Taking steps to reduce carbon emissions is good for our planet, good for our pocket books, and good for our security. Madam Minister, Distinguished guests, thank you again, and good luck in your conference.

Thank you for your attention. I hope that this panel discussion – and the separate suppliers' nuclear conference that you may be attending – both prove to be enlightening and fruitful.